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New York

President:	Mr. Cardi	(Italy)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli Frieri

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I brief the members of the Security Council today as critical infra-Palestinian talks are scheduled to open in Cairo tomorrow. The United Nations, the Middle East Quartet and the international community continue to support Egyptian efforts to sustainably implement the recent infra-Palestinian agreement and return Gaza under the control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority.

By signing the Cairo agreement on 12 October, Palestinians embarked on a long road that could lead to reconciliation. First, however, they must resolve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and return the Strip to the full civilian and security control of the Palestinian Authority (PA). If success is to be achieved, the failed policies of the past must be avoided, security for Palestinians and Israelis must be preserved, and all sides must be willing to compromise in the interest of peace.

Let me start with the good news. On 1 November, we witnessed a landmark step as the Palestinian Authority regained control over Gaza crossings. For the first time in more than a decade, on 18 November, the Rafah border crossing opened under PA control. The handover has eased access at the crossings for Palestinians with permits and ended the illegal taxation imposed by Hamas at the crossings since June 2007. The handover, if translated into full civilian and security control by the Palestinian Authority of Gaza, could be a step towards the normalization of movement in and out of the Strip.

Another important step happened on 2 November when the Palestinian committee tasked with rationalizing and integrating Gaza's public sector held its first meeting. Meanwhile, the transfer of responsibility at Gaza-based public institutions is slowly proceeding as well. Ministers of Education, Health, Transport and Environment, among others, as well as technical teams from ministries in Ramallah, have travelled to Gaza to begin restoring Government control. Some 150 PA-employed teachers have returned to work for the first time since 2007. A 10-day registration period for all PA employees in Gaza began on 12 November to determine staffing numbers, based on an evaluation of qualifications against needs. The process is proceeding in an organized manner. Some ministries, with low numbers of employees, have already accomplished the task, and others are expected to finish within a set time frame. I encourage all sides to use tomorrow's meeting in Cairo to reinforce their commitment to a gradual process of implementing the Cairo agreement and to ensure that positive momentum is sustained by upholding commitments and ensuring follow-up.

Regrettably, there is also some not-so-good news. Despite progress in implementing the Cairo agreement, Gaza residents have not seen any improvements to their daily lives. The lack of electricity has been devastating for the provision of basic services. Power outages of 18 to 20 hours a day continue; most of the population has access to piped water for only three to five hours every five days; untreated sewage continues to flow into the Mediterranean Sea at catastrophic levels; 45 per cent of essential drugs and medical supplies have now reached zero stock in Gaza. Only the most critical health, water and sanitation facilities are functioning, thanks to donor-funded emergency fuel distributed by the United Nations.

As the Palestinian Government seeks to return to Gaza, it should take immediate action to reverse measures that add to the burden of Palestinians living there. The United Nations humanitarian appeal for Gaza for 2017 calls for $25 million in new funding to meet the most critical priorities — almost $11 million of which remains unmet. I urge donors to support the appeal in order to save lives. Last week, as co-Chair of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee, Norway convened a donor meeting in Ramallah to discuss how to support

returning Gaza under Palestinian Authority control. The discussion focused on three themes.

The first theme was the need to immediately alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground, namely, by increasing electricity supply to at least pre-crisis levels, and accelerating the delivery of projects that have direct impact on the lives of Gaza's residents. The envoys of the Middle East Quartet have already tasked the Office of the Quartet with producing a list of projects that can be expedited. I encourage donors to do the same. Such actions are necessary to sustain support for the Cairo-led process on the ground.

Secondly, the donors also discussed the need to see a realistic plan by the Palestinian Authority on how it intends to take up its responsibilities in Gaza, which the international community can support financially and technically.

Thirdly, our common goal remains the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. Difficult issues — including security and putting all weapons under Government control, the rule of law and the functioning of the judiciary, civil service reform and other complicated challenges — will have to be dealt with in a step-by-step manner.

Turning to broader political dynamics on the ground, I welcome the restoration of full security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It was publicly announced that that started on 8 November. That is a positive development, as coordination is critical to the security of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

In a very worrying development, however, on 30 October, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) uncovered yet another tunnel that extended from Gaza into Israel. During the operation, at least 12 Palestinian militants were killed underground. According to statements by a spokesperson for Islamic Jihad, the group's aim in constructing the tunnel was to "kidnap Israeli soldiers," and it also stated that it will continue to pursue that goal.

I call on the international community to join the United Nations in condemning the continued construction of tunnels and the utterance of such reckless statements. At a time when Palestinians in Gaza — who have lived with closures for a decade, survived three conflicts and have had to struggle to merely exist — are seeing hope for the future, such actions and statements risk a dangerous escalation that could destroy the prospects for intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

In other developments, on 31 October, a 25-year-old Palestinian man was shot dead by Israeli security forces while in his car near a West Bank settlement. The Israeli authorities launched an investigation after an initial IDF probe indicated that the driver did not appear to have been attempting a vehicular attack when he was killed. On 17 November, two Israelis were injured in a ramming attack in the West Bank; the Palestinian driver was shot and injured by the security forces. Violence and incitement remain one of the hallmarks of the conflict, and they need to be addressed in order to rebuild trust between both sides.

Turning to the question of settlements, Israeli planning authorities have approved building permits for at least 418 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlements of Gilo and Ramat Shlomo. They also issued a conditional approval of 178 housing units in the settlement of Nof Zion, located in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Jabel Mukaber. On 10 November, the Israeli Prime Minister pledged to advance $226 million for the construction of infrastructure in the occupied West Bank that improves the connectivity of settlements to Israel, potentially facilitating their expansion.

The United Nations considers all settlement activities illegal under international law. They constitute a substantial obstacle to peace and should cease. Unfortunately, legislative action that undermines the viability of the two-State solution also continues. The Knesset considered a legislative amendment that would require a majority of 80 out of 120 members to approve any transfer of territory currently included in Israel's defined municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to a "foreign entity".

Against that backdrop, the Israeli authorities demolished or seized 30 Palestinian structures, displacing 53 persons, including 31 children, across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Three Bedouin herding communities in Area C, including Ain al-Hilweh, Um al Jmal and Jabal al-Baba, are at risk of having a total of 520 structures demolished after receiving removal-of-property orders in recent weeks. Donor-funded structures serving as schools that are also threatened with demolition are of particular concern.

Turning very briefly to Lebanon, Prime Minister Hariri's resignation, while on a trip to Saudi Arabia on 4 November, shocked Lebanon and the region. While

new uncertainties have arisen, the people of Lebanon have united behind President Aoun's call for Hariri to return. Following the Secretary-General's statement of 5 November, international statements of support for Lebanon's security, stability, sovereignty and independence have been issued at the highest levels. Prime Minister Hariri is now in Paris and expected to return to Lebanon later this week. The Officer-in-Charge of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, my colleague, Philippe Lazzarini, is scheduled to brief the Council on 29 November.

The security situation in the Golan remains of concern. Fighting between the Syrian Arab Armed Forces and armed groups and between different armed groups in parts of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side continues. In recent weeks, there were reported incidents of spillover fire from the Bravo to the Alpha side and retaliatory fire across the ceasefire line. Those developments undermine the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces and have the potential to escalate tensions and jeopardize the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and Syria.

Let me conclude with a few observations on Palestinian unity efforts. I again commend Egypt for its leadership throughout the process. Many previous attempts to bridge the Palestinian divide have failed. We cannot allow this current effort to become another missed opportunity. From the outset, I have consistently engaged with Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, the region and all stakeholders. Everyone understands that failure today will destroy hope for the foreseeable future. That division damages the Palestinian cause for statehood. Two million Palestinians in Gaza have high hopes that the Government's return will improve their lives. After living in abject misery under Hamas control and locked in by the closures, their situation is close to exploding.

With all the difficulties inherent in the Egyptian-led process and concerns about the timing and modalities of the Palestinian Authority's assumption of full civilian and security control of Gaza, the process must not be allowed to fail. If it does, it will most likely result in another devastating conflict. Whether that conflict would be triggered by a meltdown of law and order in Gaza, by the reckless action of extremists or by strategic choice, the result will be the same — devastation and suffering for all. That cycle must be avoided at all costs.

All of us, especially Palestinian leaders, Israel and the international community, have an important responsibility to advance the peace efforts. In that context, I am concerned about the implications of the latest developments related to the Palestinian Liberation Organization representative office in the United States. Only through constructive dialogue can we hope to advance peace, and I call on all parties to remain engaged in the peace effort.

I believe and hope that a genuine change in Gaza, including full security control by the Palestinian Authority, will contribute to restoring confidence in the feasibility of a comprehensive peace agreement. That is a Palestinian-owned process. All Palestinian factions must seize this opportunity to open a new page for their people.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli Frieri (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We once again thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. Above all, we thank him for his continued work, for which he can and will continue to count on the support of Uruguay, including when our term on the Security Council comes to an end.

Unfortunately, as has happened on numerous other occasions, we must begin our statement by condemning a fresh attack. This time, we condemn the attack that took place on 17 November on the West Bank, which was carried out by a Palestinian assailant and left two Israelis injured. Such violence and terrorist attacks, as well as their incitement and glorification, do nothing to advance peace, and they endanger the possibility of reaching a two-State solution.

This year marks many anniversaries related to the still unresolved conflict. This month marks 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, which initiated a process that ended with the partition of Palestine and was then finalized three decades later through General Assembly resolution 181 (II), exactly 70 years ago. It has also been 50 years since the 1967 war and the occupation of territories that followed.

Despite the numerous multilateral, regional and unilateral initiatives to try to end the conflict, we are still far from glimpsing a peaceful and mutually

acceptable solution. The two-State solution remains the only viable option to end the conflict — there is no alternative plan B. Direct bilateral negotiations must be relaunched as soon as possible to clarify all unresolved issues.

To achieve that goal, it is necessary to reverse current trends on the ground. If not, it will be extremely difficult for Palestine to consolidate its territory as a State. Uruguay maintains strong ties with both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. We again reaffirm the right of Israel and Palestine to live peacefully, within secure and recognized borders, in an atmosphere of renewed cooperation that is free of any threat or act that might undermine peace.

Almost a year after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), we regret that there has been little progress in its implementation, and that Israel has continued and intensified its settlement policy on Palestinian territory. We condemn that practice and call for its immediate cessation. We reject the explicit support of the Israeli authorities for that settlement policy, which continues to advance at full speed, despite resolution 2334 (2016) and the repeated calls of the entire international community.

We reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace and the two-State solution. That policy is accompanied by the ongoing demolitions of Palestinian homes on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem and clearly illegal initiatives under international law to annex settlements under Israeli jurisdiction. Those actions clearly exacerbate tension; other actions and measures are necessary, which, to date, have not been taken. Otherwise, it will be increasingly difficult to arrive at a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution.

We await next month's presentation of the fourth quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) by the Special Coordinator. We reiterate our wish for the report to be circulated in writing prior to the meeting, so that we are able to analyse its findings and then voice our opinions following careful consideration of the document.

On a more positive note, the reconciliation agreement that was signed in October between the Hamas and Fatah Palestinian groups undoubtedly represents an important step towards achieving Palestinian unity. We thank Egypt for its important role in that successful process. The recent return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip to retake control after a decade is very good news, which should be sufficiently highlighted and commended. The reunification of Palestine under a single, legitimate and democratic Government is essential to providing for the aspirations of the Palestinian people, and could substantially improve living conditions in an area that has been engulfed in a serious humanitarian crisis since the armed conflict of 2007.

For that agreement to be successfully implemented, it will also be essential that those measures be accompanied by agreements on security, the disarmament of Hamas and the renunciation of violence and the destruction of Israel as a declared objective.

In this still very complex scenario, in which there is a glimmer of hope, it is necessary, more than ever, that the Security Council and the entire international community remain united in their desire to see a peaceful resolution of all the aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Only then will we be able to exert due pressure on the authorities to stop the trends that threaten that process, and ask them to be sufficiently flexible and reasonable, so that they understand once and for all that peace is a much more valuable goal than the violence, hatred and injustice that have characterized the region over the past few decades.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the briefing by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

We are currently attending a further meeting to address the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Over the course of this meeting, we have not been given very encouraging news, and the persistent and challenging attitudes of the Government of Israel towards the international community remain.

For my delegation, it is disheartening that, a little more than 11 months after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), none of the mandates set out therein have been fulfilled; on the contrary, according to the statement of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine in its letter to the presidency of the Council, dated 14 November, earlier this month the Israeli occupation forces issued demolition orders against 60 homes or infrastructure that are owned by Palestinians in Palestinian territory.

Those arbitrary measures that Israel intends to impose on Palestinian territory, which it has also forcefully occupied for more than 50 years ago, would result in the forced dispossession and displacement of 300 Palestinian civilians from the villages of Ain al-Hilweh and Um al-Jamal. In that regard, if Israel achieves its wish, the number of settlers in that region would increase from 6,000 to at least 12,000, which would be in direct and repeated violation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

We note with deep concern the persistent inhuman blockade that is inflicted by the Government of Israel against the Palestinian people. We wish to remind that occupying Power that, since the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), of 22 November, it has acted in contempt of the primary principles of Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations.

With that in mind, we urgently call on all members of the Security Council to take immediate action, without further delay, to ensure that Israel ends what was described in the latest report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967 as "the longest-running military occupation in the modern world". The occupation violates the fundamental right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and undermines the possibility of a two-State solution.

Bolivia is obliged to recall that, as a result of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, an energy crisis is forcing the Palestinian inhabitants of the region to live with only four hours of electricity per day. Due to interruptions in the provision of electricity, a humanitarian crisis has erupted in the form of an attack on the human right to health. Hospitals and medical centres are severely affected as they are forced to discharge patients prematurely, to mention but one of the many serious consequences affecting the population. For example, in August, five cancer patients died while waiting for permits to be issued by Israel in order to travel to receive the necessary treatment. Similarly, according to the aforementioned report, the supply of water to the Gaza Strip is limited to a few hours every four to five days, while the desalination plants operate at just 15 per cent of their capacity. Bolivia urges Israel to put an immediate and complete end to the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip and immediately allow an ongoing and unconditional opening of the crossing points in order to allow humanitarian aid and commercial goods to enter and people to leave.

On the other hand, we take this opportunity to welcome with great optimism the fact that, as a result of the agreement reached between the parties on 12 October in Cairo, a solution to the intra-Palestinian conflict has been reached, allowing the Palestinian Authority to resume full functionality in the territories of the Gaza Strip. We are pleased that the world is able to witness this true expression of Palestinian unity. In this regard, we express our satisfaction and appreciation to the Government of Egypt and other countries of the region that are supporting this process to strengthen the legitimate presence of the democratic and legitimately Palestinian National Authority in the Gaza Strip so that, to the extent possible, it may overcome the devastating humanitarian crisis that persists in the region.

Bolivia, as a pacifist State, believes that the only way to achieve just and lasting peace in the conflict between Israel and Palestine is through sincere dialogue and clear expressions of political will on the part of both sides to achieve the two-State solution. To that end, we reiterate our full commitment to multilateralism within the framework of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. We condemn violence, regardless of its origin, and call on the parties to renounce it.

As on previous occasions, we reiterate our expectation that the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will be provided to us in writing, which would allow us to see in detail the progress made in its implementation. We would also like to see updated maps of all the settlements in occupied Palestinian territories.

Finally, Bolivia reaffirms its support for the self-determination of the Palestinian people and their right to live in a free, sovereign and independent State within its pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 9.35 a.m.